

Which Knowledge Domains Are Important in the Work of Educational Sign Language Interpreters: the Perspective of Teachers

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Contribution

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In the last years an increased number of students who are deaf and hard-of-hearing are educated within regular schools by hearing teachers (Krause, Kegl, & Schick, 2008). Within this context, the educational interpreters assumes a nuclear role whose abilities to interpret, as stated by Schick, Williams and Kuperminis (2006), represents the major predictor for the quality of students' access to the classroom content. If the importance of educational interpreters as facilitators of communication is consensually recognized, the extension of their functions within classroom raises some questions. In fact, two perspectives can be found in literature regarding the role and consequent knowledge of educational interpreters in inclusive classrooms. One of those perspectives stresses that, as in every interpreting setting, the function of educational interpreters is interpreting, in this case, the teacher discourse. The other perspective considers the impact of educational context in the interpretation process meaning that the performance educational interpreters' role should take into account variables that support teaching-learning processes (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001; Schick et al., 2006). This second perspective states that, additionally to interpreting knowledge – namely in skills needed for voice-to-sign and sign-to-voice interpretation – educational interpreters should also have knowledge about education and child development across life span, due to their role in mediating learning experiences (Antia & Kreimeyer, 2001; Schick, 2001).

In Portugal there is no information about quality standards supporting the role of sign language interpreters who work within regular schools as it happens in other countries such as United States (e.g., Ohio Department of Education, 2011). The only parameter for sign language interpreters working on regular schools is to be highly qualified. Indeed, the sign language interpreters' preparation program is recognized as a 1st cycle

degree course since 1999.

In order to contribute for the development of educational interpreters' career, we examined the opinion of themselves and regular teachers of students who are deaf and hard-of-hearing about the kind of knowledge that educational interpreters should have. For that, we developed the *Knowledge of Educational Interpreters* (KEI) questionnaire, which items endorsed three domains of knowledge grounded on literature about: *interpreting skills; processes inherent to learning and teaching and; specific aspects to interpret inside classrooms*. This study aims to evaluate: (1) how important are for teachers and interpreters the different knowledge domains in the performance of interpreters' role in educational settings? (2) To what extent teachers and interpreters consider that educational interpreters have knowledge in each domain? (3) How important are initial training, in-field experience and informal opinion exchange as source of each knowledge domain in the opinion of interpreters.

Method

The sample was drawn from all 23 Reference Schools for the Bilingual Teaching of Deaf Students. All interpreters and regular teachers working with deaf students from 5th to 12th grades (aged 9-18 years) were invited to participate. The total number of participants was 277 : 57 interpreters and 222 regular teachers. The KEI, is a self-report instrument based on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (Schick & Williams, 1994), the questionnaire Pedagogical Knowledge Questionnaire (Sanchez-Ferreira, 2002) and the state of art in interpreting theme. It comprised 32 items evaluated in three scales: importance and presence of knowledge : filled by teachers and interpreters and; source of knowledge : filled only by interpreters. The importance and presence scales used 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all important/present; 5=very important/present). In the third scale the source of knowledge encompassed in each item was identified: initial training, in-field experience and informal opinion exchange. Data gathered with KEI were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis to examine its internal structure and confirm the three-factor solution. Differences were examined across professional-groups, with t-test for independent samples, and within professional-groups with the application of multivariate analysis of variance for repeated measures.

Expected Outcomes

The results support the use of KEI to gain a better comprehension of what knowledge domains should encompass the profile of educational interpreters. The three knowledge domains were confirmed by the evaluation of the questionnaire internal structure explaining 55.53% of total variance. Internal consistency was good (.814 and above) across the different domains. Despite considering the three knowledge domains important (mean rate above 3.81), teachers and interpreters share a similar point of view about the nuclear domain embodying the profile of educational interpreters, which reflect the opinion that their role is mainly to interpret the classroom contents. If we consider that having knowledge predicts better practices, it is interesting to note that teachers perceived all knowledge domains more present than interpreters, suggesting that they have a more positive opinion about the interpreters' role than interpreters themselves. Whilst in-field experience was stressed by most of interpreters as the source of interpreting knowledge, initial training was mentioned as the main source of knowledge about processes inherent to learning and teaching and aspects of classroom management. These results will be discussed in terms of the need to extend the interpreters' role beyond interpreting towards a more sustained participation in educational teams.

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